

NCHS Data on Use of Special Education

About NCHS

The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) is the nation's principal health statistics agency, providing data to identify and address health issues. NCHS compiles statistical information to help guide public health and health policy decisions.

Collaborating with other public and private health partners, NCHS employs a variety of data collection mechanisms to obtain accurate information from multiple sources. This process provides multiple perspectives to help us understand the population's health, influences on health, and health outcomes.

Special Education Services

Special education services exist to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities. These services may be offered in regular or special schools, in hospitals, or at home. Conditions qualifying children for special education services include: mental retardation, hearing and visual impairments, speech or language impairments, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, and specific learning disabilities. Some children with these conditions do not need special education services.

The National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) collects information from parents about the use of special education services by children, along with detailed data about children's demographic characteristics, health conditions, and use of health care. The 2001 NHIS findings about use of special education services are presented here.

Key Findings

Use of special education services

- In 2001, parents reported that over 3.5 million children 6-17 years of age received special education services.
- Nearly 9 percent of boys received special education services compared with 5 percent of girls.
- Over 11 percent of children from poor families received special education services compared with 6 percent of children from affluent families (families with incomes at least 400 percent of the poverty level).
- Hispanic children were less likely than non-Hispanic white and non-Hispanic black children to receive special education services.

Conditions of children in special education

- The conditions most frequently mentioned by parents were learning disability (42 percent), Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (25 percent), other mental, emotional, or behavioral problems (16 percent), and speech problems (16 percent).
- Less frequently mentioned conditions included mental retardation, hearing and vision problems, and asthma.

Use of health care by children in special education

- Children receiving special education services were reported by parents to have used more health care than children not receiving these services.
- Over a third of children receiving special education services, compared with 12 percent of children not receiving these services, had a physical or mental condition for which they had taken some type of prescription medication regularly for at least 3 months.

Special Education Services Data Source

The **National Health Interview Survey** (NHIS) obtains information on the nation's health status through confidential household interviews that measure: health status and disability, insurance coverage, access to care, use of health services, immunizations (child), health behaviors, injury, and the ability to perform daily activities. NCHS obtains data on special education service needs through information obtained from an adult (usually a parent) knowledgeable about the health of the child. (<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm>)

For further information about NCHS and its programs, visit us at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs>,
or call the Office of Planning, Budget and Legislation at 301-458-4100.